



National Women's History Month

History of Women's History Month

March 31, 2016

In 1980, the National Women's History Project (NWHF) was founded in Santa Rosa, California, by Molly Murphy MacGregor, Mary Ruthsdotter, Maria Cuevas, Paula Hammett and Bette Morgan to broadcast women's historical achievements. The NWHF started by leading a coalition that successfully lobbied Congress to designate March as National Women's History Month, now celebrated across the United States. Since 1987, the National Women's History Month resolution has been approved with broad-based bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. The idea of celebrating the unique, multicultural history of women in the U.S. has captured the imaginations of government agencies, businesses, schools, community groups, women's organizations, and thousands of individuals throughout the nation.

Learning the true stories of women's history has a positive effect on everyone. For women and girls, these empowering stories from America's shared past generate feelings of personal strength and new possibilities. Correspondingly, men and boys gain increased respect for women by knowing more about their individual accomplishments, and about the female experience across time. Celebrating the lives of women and their caring, courageous contributions is valuable for us all.

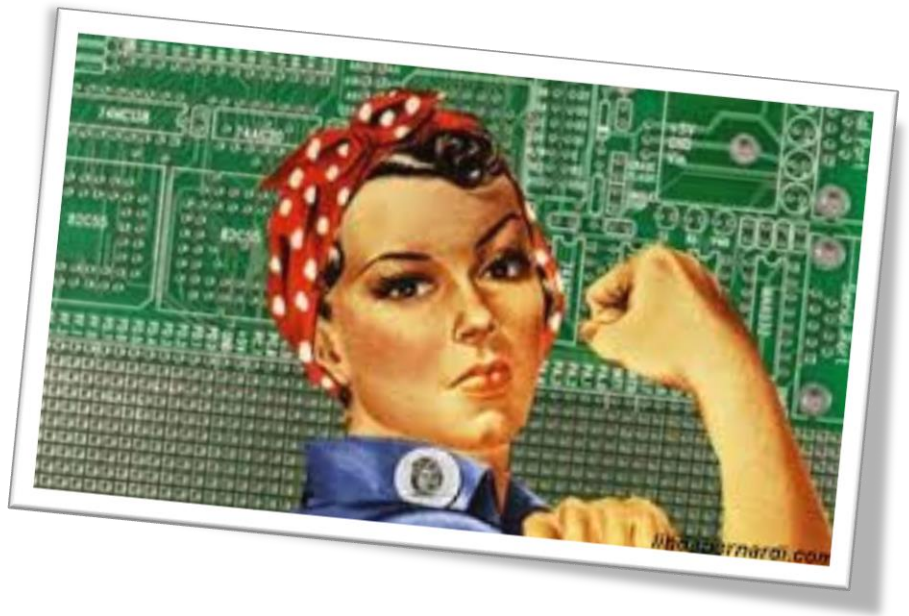
Women's history is filled with women whose lives and work have transformed American communities and the ideas of their day. Women's history is also about countless women who have lived out their lives quietly at the center of their families. Together, these women represent many and varied cultures, faiths, aspirations and beliefs. And, they

have all contributed significantly to building our society and culture.

History looks different when the contributions of women are included as routinely as those of men. When we see history in this new way, it is as if we are looking through a wide-angle lens. More of the picture comes into view. By adjusting our focus, details that were missing become clear. An expanded view of history lets us see ourselves and our connection to the past differently. When we see history in a new way, we can see new possibilities for the future, as well.



Women in the United States



Quick Facts

As of 2014

- _ Women made up 50.8% of the population in the United States, about the same as 1960.
- _ 58.2% of women were in the labor force, up from 37.7% in 1960
- _ 59.6% of the labor force was female, up from 46.5% in 2008.
- _ 34% of lawyers were women.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Department of Labor, 2014; American Bar Association, 2015; Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2010.



As of the most recent census bureau data in 2014:

- _ 32.3% of physicians were women.
- _ 91.1% of registered nurses were women.
- _ 97% of pre-school and kindergarten teachers were women.
- _ 25.5% of chief executives were women.

SOURCES

According to the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Labor, 2014; American Bar Association, 2015; Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2010.

FAST FACTS

\$.79

In 2014, women full-time workers made only 79 cents for every dollar earned by men. This means the gender gap currently stands at 21 percent.

\$39,621

Women's median earnings compared to \$50,383 for men. Neither women's nor men's earnings significantly improved compared to 2013. If this pace of change in the annual earnings ratio continues at the same rate as it has since 1960, it will take another 45 years, until 2059, for men and women to reach parity.



As of 2014, women comprised about 15 percent of the United States military, with 214,098 total active duty women. There were 1,853,690 women veterans as of 2014.

First in Law

Annette Abbott Adams - First woman to hold office as U.S. assistant attorney general (1920); first to be U.S. district attorney (1918); first to be assistant U.S. attorney (1914).

Florence Ellinwood Allen - First woman on the U.S. Court of Appeals (1934); first on the Ohio Supreme Court (1922); first on any general court (1920).

Violette N. Anderson - First African American woman admitted to the Supreme Court Bar (1926).

Lyda B. Conley - First Native American woman to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court (1910)

Mary H. Donlan - First woman to be editor-in-chief of a law review (1919); first to be appointed to the federal bench from New York state (1955).

Sarah Tilghman Hughes - First woman federal judge to swear in a U.S. president (1963).

Ada Kepley - First woman to receive a law degree from an accredited institution (1870), Union College of Law (now the law school of Northwestern University).

Belva Lockwood - First woman lawyer admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court (1879), the first woman to argue a case before the Supreme Court (1880).

Arabelle Mansfield - First woman to be admitted to the bar (1869 in Iowa).

Burnita S. Matthews - First woman to serve as a federal district judge (1949).

Esther Morris - First woman justice of the peace (1870).

Sandra Day O'Connor - First woman Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (1981).



Roberta Ramo— First woman elected President of American Bar Association (1995).

Charlotte E. Ray - First woman to graduate from Howard Law School (she disguised her sex by applying as C.E. Ray); first black woman in the United States to earn a law degree (1872).

Kathryn Sellers - First woman to be head judge of a juvenile court (1918).

Susie M. Sharp - First woman elected Chief Justice of a state supreme court in a popular election (1975).

Sonia Sotomayor - First Hispanic woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court (2009).

Susan Brandeis Gilbert - First daughter of a Supreme Court justice to argue a case before the Supreme Court. Her father, Louis D. Brandeis, who served from 1916 to 1939, absented himself in this case (1925).

Lucile Lomen - First woman clerk of the Supreme Court (1944).



First Achievements for Women

1848 Astronomer Maria Mitchell becomes the first woman elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; almost a century passes before a second woman is elected.

1850 Quaker physicians establish the Female (later Woman's) Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia to give women a chance to learn medicine. Due to threats against them, the first women graduated under police guard.

1855 Lucy Stone becomes the first woman on record to keep her own name after marriage, setting a trend among women who are consequently known as "Lucy Stoners."

1866 The American Equal Rights Association is founded, the first organization in the U.S. to advocate national woman suffrage.

1868 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony begin publishing *The Revolution*, an important women's movement periodical.

1870 The first issue of the *Woman's Journal* appears, sponsored by the American Woman Suffrage Association and edited by Mary Livermore. It is published until 1917.

1872 Susan B. Anthony and fourteen women register and vote in the presidential election to test whether the recently adopted Fourteenth Amendment can be interpreted as protecting women's rights. Anthony is arrested, tried, found guilty, and fined \$100, which she refuses to pay.

1875 In *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162 (1874), the Supreme Court denies women voting rights, in contradiction to the 14th Amendment.

1877 Helen Magill is the first woman to receive a Ph.D. at a U.S. school, a doctorate in Greek from Boston University.

1878 The Susan B. Anthony Amendment, to grant women the vote, is first introduced in the U.S. Congress.

1884 Belva Lockwood, presidential candidate of the National Equal Rights Party, is the first woman to receive votes in a presidential election (approx. 4,000 in six states).

1900 Two-thirds of divorce cases are initiated by women. A century earlier, most women lacked the right to sue.

1900 For the first time, women are allowed to compete in the Olympics. Margaret Aggot wins a gold medal in golf for the U.S.

1910 In Washington State, women win the right to vote.

1912 Juliette Gordon Low founds American Girl Guides, now Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., encouraging outdoor activity, self-reliance, resourcefulness, and preparation for varied roles as adults.

1914 Mother's Day becomes a national holiday.

1920 On August 26, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, guaranteeing American women citizens the right to vote.



1950 The U.S. Census Bureau recognizes a married woman's right to use her birth name.



1955 Rosa Parks is arrested for crossing the color line on a bus, igniting the Civil Rights Movement.



1961 President Kennedy creates the President's Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. Fifty parallel state commissions are eventually established.

1930 Women are about 44 percent of college students. At Black colleges, women are about 40 percent of the graduates, double the number of 1920.



Amelia Earhart

1932 Amelia Earhart flies solo across the Atlantic Ocean (second only after Lindbergh).

1933 Eleanor Roosevelt becomes the first president's wife to hold a press conference.

1941 A massive government and industry media campaign persuades women to take jobs during the war. Almost 7 million women respond, 2 million as industrial "Rosie the Riveters" and 400,000 joining the military.

1948 Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) becomes the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate in her own right. In 1964, she becomes the first woman to run for the U.S. Presidency in the primaries of a major political party (Republican). She serves in the Senate until 1973.

1961 Jerrie Cobb is the first of 14 women qualifying for NASA's new astronaut program.

1964 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act is enacted, barring employment discrimination by private employers, employment agencies, and unions based on race, sex, and other grounds. To investigate complaints and enforce penalties, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is established, which receives 50,000 complaints of gender discrimination in its first five years.

1964 Patsy Mink (D-HI) is the first Asian-American woman elected to the U.S. Congress.

1965 Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order 11246 requires federal agencies and federal contractors to take "affirmative action" in overcoming employment discrimination.

1968 Federally Employed Women is founded to end gender-based discrimination in civil service jobs. Within two decades, FEW has 200 chapters nationwide.

1969 California adopts the nation's first "no fault" divorce law, allowing couples to divorce by mutual consent.

1971 For the first time in its 130 years, the Fourteenth Amendment is used to overturn a sex-biased law in the Supreme Court case *Reed v. Reed*, 404 U.S. 71 (1971).

1971 The non-partisan National Women's Political Caucus is founded to encourage women to run for public office.

1972 Congress extends the Equal Pay Act to include executives and administrative and professional personnel.

1972 Congress passes the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, giving the EEOC power to take legal action to enforce its rulings.

1972 Barbara Jordan (D-TX) becomes the first Black woman elected to Congress from a Southern state.

1973 The U.S. military is integrated when the women-only branches are eliminated.

1973 In *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), the Supreme Court allows the termination of an early pregnancy.

1974 The Little League agrees to include girls "in deference to a change in social climate," but creates a softball branch specifically for girls to draw them from baseball.

1974 The Equal Credit Opportunity Act forbids sex discrimination in all consumer credit practices; it is extended to commercial credit in 1988.

1974 Ella Grasso becomes the first woman to win election as governor in her own right, in Connecticut.

1976 The United Nations "Decade for Women" begins.

1976 The U.S. military academies open admissions to women.

1976 Title IX goes into effect (see 1972 entry), opening the way for women's increased participation in athletics programs and professional schools. Enrollments leap in both categories. Title IX withstands repeated court challenges over time (see 1997 entry).

1978 100,000 march in support of the Equal Rights Amendment in Washington, D.C.

1978 The Older Women's League is founded to address age-and-gender discrimination issues including health insurance and retirement benefits.

1978 For the first time in history, more women than men enter college.

1978 Women's History Week debuts in Sonoma County, California. Congress declares March as National Women's History Month in 1987.

1979 Owanah Anderson founds and directs the Ohoyo Resource Center to advance the status of American Indian/Alaska Native women.

1979 The National Association for Black Women Entrepreneurs is formed by Marilyn French-Hubbard to offer advice, training, and networking for Black businesswomen.

1979 Susan B. Anthony is the first U.S. woman to have her portrait on a coin – a silver dollar – in general circulation.

1980 Jewell Jackson-McCabe founds the National Coalition of 100 Black Women.

1980 The "gender gap" first shows up at the election polls as women report different political priorities than men.

1980 President Carter proclaims the first "National Women's History Week," incorporating

March 8, International Women's Day.

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1981 Sandra Day O'Connor is the first woman nominated for appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1993, she is joined by Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

1981 The National Black Women's Health Project is founded to establish community-based self-help groups.

1983 Physicist Sally Ride, Ph.D., becomes America's first woman astronaut, spending 6 days in space as flight engineer aboard the *Challenger*.

1984 Geraldine Ferraro is the first woman vice-presidential candidate of a major political party.

1986 Jeana Yeager makes history co-piloting the first non-stop flight around the world without refueling.

1987 National Women's History Month is added to the federal calendar.

1990 Women in their 20s, calling themselves "the third wave," begin forming myriad organizations to tackle their generation's particular concerns and vulnerabilities.

1990 Women earn 36 percent of all doctorates, up from 11% in 1960, and 14.3% in 1970.

1990 The office of Women's Health Research is established within the National Institutes of Health to

increase women's representation in all medical research.

1992 Women are allowed to fly combat aircraft, opening the way for advances in their military careers.

1992 Women win all five of the gold medals won by Americans during the Winter Olympics.

1992 In what the media calls "The Year of the Woman," a record number of women run for public office, and win. They include: the first Mexican-American woman and first Puerto Rican woman in the House, Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) and Nydia Velazquez (D-NY); the first Black woman Senator, Carole Moseley Braun (D-IL); and both Senators for California, Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein.

1993 Ruth Bader Ginsburg is nominated for appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.

1993 The Women's Rights National Historical Park is dedicated in Seneca Falls, New York, the first women's history site in the National Park Service.

1993 With the increased number of women members, the 103rd Congress passes into law 30 bills on women's issues during its first year, 33 during its second. The previous record for any year: 5.

1993 Take Our Daughters to Work Day debuts, designed to build girls' self-esteem and open their eyes to a variety of career possibilities for women.

1995 Women enrolled in medical school at Yale, Harvard, and Johns Hopkins outnumber men for the first time.

1996 U.S. women star in the Summer Olympics as they win 19 gold medals, 10 silver, and 9 bronze.

1996 The Women's National Basketball Association ("WNBA") is formed as the counterpart to the National Basketball Association ("NBA"). League play begins the following year.

1996 In *United States v. Virginia*, the Supreme Court rules that the all-male Virginia Military School has to admit women in order to continue to receive public funding. It holds that creating a separate, all-female school will not suffice.

1999 Colonel Eileen Collins, the first woman to pilot a U.S. spacecraft (1995), becomes the first woman commander of an American space flight.

1999 The United States women's soccer team wins the FIFA Women's World Cup, beating China in a shootout in the final match.

2000 As part of an increasing number of projects throughout the U.S. to honor historical women's contributions, The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts, the City of Boston, and the Boston Women's Heritage Trail collaborated to create a walking trail honoring "Women Artists in the Back Bay."

2001 The Equal Rights Amendment is reintroduced in Congress.

2002 For the first time in the history of the United States, 57 women serve in the U.S. Congress: 13 women in the U.S. Senate, and 44 women serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.

2002 There are 1,668 women state legislators serving nationwide. The five states with the highest percentage of women state legislators are: Washington (38.8%), Arizona (35.6%), Nevada (34.9%), Colorado (34%) and Oregon (33%).

2002 Shirley Caldwell Tilghman, president of Princeton University and a noted molecular biologist, is named the Northern American Laureate for the Women in Science Award. Tilghman was a leader in the national effort to map the human genome. This award honors the top five women scientists in the world.

2005 Condoleezza Rice becomes the first African American woman appointed Secretary of State.

2005 In *Jackson v. Birmingham Board of Education*, the Supreme Court rules that Title IX, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, also inherently prohibits disciplining someone for complaining about sex-based discrimination.

2007 Nancy Pelosi becomes the first woman Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

2009 President Obama signed the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act, which allows victims of pay discrimination to file a complaint with the government against their employer within 180 days of their last paycheck. Previously, victims were only allowed 180 days from the date of the first unfair paycheck.

2009 Sonia Sotomayor is nominated for appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.

2009 Elinor Ostrom becomes the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics.

2010 Kathryn Bigelow becomes the first woman to win the Academy Award for Best Director, the BAFTA Award for Best Direction, and the Critics' Choice Award for Best Director (all for *The Hurt Locker* (2008)).



Nancy Pelosi

The Honorable Stephanie D. Thacker

Circuit Judge for the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit



years, serving as Deputy Chief of Litigation for two years and then as Principal Deputy Chief of Litigation for five years. She also was part of the team that prosecuted the first case the U.S. ever brought involving the Violence Against Women Act.

In 2006, Thacker joined the Charleston, West Virginia law firm Guthrie & Thomas as a partner.

In July 2011, the West Virginia Record reported that President Obama would select Thacker to the judicial vacancy on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit that had been created by the death of Judge M. Blane Michael. Michael had died in March 2011.

On September 8, 2011, Obama formally nominated Thacker to be a judge on the Fourth Circuit. The Judiciary Committee reported her nomination to the floor of the Senate on November 3, 2011.

The United States Senate confirmed her nomination by a vote of 91 ayes to 3 nays on April 16, 2012. She received her commission on April 17, 2012.

Born Stephanie Dawn Young in Huntington, West Virginia, she was raised in Hamlin, West Virginia, Thacker earned a bachelor's degree from Marshall University in 1987 and her law degree from West Virginia University College of Law in 1990.

After graduating from law school, Thacker spent two years working in the Pittsburgh office of the law firm Kirkpatrick & Lockhart (now K&L Gates). She then worked briefly for the West Virginia Office of the Attorney General before joining the law firm King, Betts & Allen.

In 1994, Thacker took a job in the United States Attorney's office for the Southern District of West Virginia, serving as an Assistant United States Attorney in the Criminal Division and handling a wide range of criminal prosecutions.

In 1999, Thacker moved to Washington, D.C. to work as a trial attorney in the United States Department of Justice's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. She worked there for seven

The Honorable Elizabeth Virginia Hallanan

United States District Judge for the Southern
District of West Virginia, Deceased 2004



Born in Charleston, West Virginia, Hallanan received a B.A. from Morris Harvey College (now the University of Charleston) in 1946 and a J.D. from West Virginia University College of Law in 1951.

She was a member of the West Virginia State Board of Education in Charleston from 1955 to 1957. She served in the West Virginia House of Delegates from 1957 to 1958, and was then appointed as an assistant commissioner of public instruction from 1958 to 1959.

Then as a judge on the Juvenile Court, Kanawha County, West Virginia, from 1959 to 1961. This was the first time a woman had held a judgeship in West Virginia.

She was the executive director of the West Virginia Association of Colleges and Universities from 1961 to 1969.

She served as Chairman of the West Virginia Public Service Commission from 1969 to 1975. West

Virginia Governor Arch Moore appointed Hallanan to serve as the agency's first chairwoman.

She was in private practice in Charleston, West Virginia from 1975 to 1984.

On November 8, 1983, Hallanan was nominated by President Ronald Reagan to a seat on the United States District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia vacated by Dennis R. Knapp. She was confirmed by the United States Senate on November 11, 1983, and received her commission on November 14, 1983. She was West Virginia's first female judge.

She assumed senior status on December 1, 1996, serving in that capacity until her death in 2004, in Charleston, West Virginia.

Elizabeth Hallanan was a champion of women, encouraging them to seek positions of responsibility in the public and private sectors and she was a protector of children as she ordered major changes in how child support is collected and used to improve the welfare of children. She was at the center of the controversy over the enactment of legislation to allow school-led silent prayer in West Virginia's schools when as a devout Roman Catholic, she struck down the law after she became convinced that it violated the establishment of religion clause in the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Judge Hallanan was known to run her courtroom firmly, but with dignity and courtesy and she was interested in other people - to her, everyone was on the same level. Her life is a model of judicial integrity, pioneering accomplishments as a woman in positions of authority and responsibility traditionally held by men and her sense of fairness and respect for people, is truly a life well lived.

The Honorable Irene C. Berger

United States District Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia



A native of McDowell County, West Virginia, Judge Irene Berger is the youngest of nine children born to Nathaniel and Irene O. Calloway Berger. She is married to David Howell.

She graduated from West Virginia University in 1976 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics, and from the West Virginia University College of Law in 1979. After graduation, she was a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Charleston until 1982, when she joined the Office of the Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney. In 1994, she accepted a position as Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of West Virginia.

In June 1994, Judge Berger was appointed by Governor Gaston Caperton to fill a vacancy as Circuit Judge of Kanawha County for the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit of West Virginia. She became the first African American female on the Circuit Court of West Virginia. She was elected to the unexpired term of Circuit Judge in 1996, and to full terms in 2000 and 2008. She was unopposed in all elections. During her tenure on the state bench, she was assigned by Administrative Order of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals to sit temporarily as a justice of that Court in instances of recusal.

She was named Woman of the Year by the Charleston Area Business and Professional Women's Club in 1996, and in 1997 she received the Celebrate Women Award from the West Virginia Women's Commission in the category of Government. In 2000, she was named an Outstanding Woman of Achievement by the Charleston YWCA and received the West Virginia University College of Law Women's Law Caucus Distinguished Woman in the

Law Award for the Public Sector. In 2002, she was named a Fellow of the West Virginia State Bar Foundation and honored as a West Virginia African American Woman of Distinction by the West Virginia Women's Commission. In the same year, she became a permanent member of the Fourth Circuit Judicial Conference. In 2003, she was named a Fellow of the American Bar Association and given the Mountain State Bar Association Merit Award. In 2004, she was awarded the Community Champion Award by the Kanawha Institute for Social Research and Action and honored as a Distinguished West Virginian by then Governor Bob Wise. In 2006, Judge Berger was named Outstanding Alumna by the West Virginia University Alumni Association. In 2007, she was awarded the NAACP Image Award for Leadership by the Charleston, West Virginia, branch of the NAACP, and in 2008 received the Departmental Alumni Award from the Department of Mathematics of the West Virginia University Eberly College of Arts and Sciences.

Judge Berger has served as Chairperson for the Legal Services for the Poor Symposium and as President of the Board of Directors of the West Virginia University Alumni Association. She has been a member of the following civic and professional organizations: West Virginia University Foundation Board of Directors, West Virginia University College of Law Visiting Committee, West Virginia University Institutional Board of Advisors, West Virginia University Social Justice Visiting Committee, West Virginia University Student Affairs Visiting Committee, University of Charleston Board of Trustees, West Virginia Judicial Association, Mountain State Bar Association, Juvenile Justice Committee, the Governor's Domestic Violence Advisory Committee and the Children and Families Interim Committee of the West Virginia Legislature. She has served on the Board of Directors of the Legal Services Corporation, Family & Children Together and Keep a Child in School. She has also served as a judge for the West Virginia University College of Law Moot Court competition and participated in the Judge in Residency program at Washington and Lee School of Law. Judge Berger has been a presenter for numerous continuing legal education seminars.

On November 9, 2009, Judge Berger was appointed by President Barack Obama to the position of United States District Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia, and, as such, became the first African American Federal Judge in West Virginia.

The Honorable Cheryl A. Eifert

United States Magistrate Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia



Defense Trial Counsel of West Virginia and chaired the Law & Medicine Committee of the West Virginia Bar. Judge Eifert is a member of the bars of West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky.

Judge Eifert resides in Barboursville, West Virginia with her husband and two children. Judge Eifert's daughter is currently a freshman at WVU studying elementary education. Her son attends eighth grade at Milton Middle School.

Cheryl Ann Eifert was born in Akron, Ohio in 1958. She, along with her two siblings, grew up in Bath, Ohio. She graduated from Miami University in 1980 with a B.A. degree in English and a B.A. degree in Speech Communications. She received her law degree from Ohio State University Michael E. Moritz College of Law in 1983.

Following law school, Judge Eifert entered private practice with the Huntington, West Virginia law firm of Jenkins, Fenstermaker, Krieger, Kayes & Farrell, where she became the firm's first female partner. In 1993, Judge Eifert participated in the creation of a boutique litigation firm, Offutt, Eifert, Fisher & Nord, which provided litigation services in West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio. In 1997, she joined the Office of General Counsel at West Virginia's largest tertiary care center, Charleston Area Medical Center, and served as Associate General Counsel from 2002 through 2006. She returned to private litigation practice at Offutt Nord PLLC in 2006. On September 1, 2010, she was appointed as United States Magistrate Judge, Southern District of West Virginia, at Huntington.

Judge Eifert has served on The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia's Committee on the Revision of the West Virginia Rules of Civil Procedure and its Committee to Draft Pattern Jury Instructions. She has also served on the Board of Governors of

The Honorable Mary E. Stanley

United States Magistrate Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia, Retired 2013



The State Journal
March 25, 2013

U.S. Magistrate Judge Mary Stanley described her 40-year legal career in one word — "fulfilling."

Thumbing through papers on her desk and eyeing the cardboard boxes against the wall, Stanley said she's not regretted being a lawyer or a judge.

"It's always been interesting. It's always challenged me mentally and intellectually. You can see I have a lot of paper on my desk. I'm in a completely different area of the law that I've never dealt with before and it really has me engaged," she said.

Stanley, who will retire from the bench on March 29, has had many firsts in her career — serving as West Virginia's first woman assistant U.S. attorney and the first U.S. magistrate judge.

"Being first is largely a function of showing up at the right time when other people are ready to consider you," Stanley said. "So, I was kind of on that first wave of women coming out of law school."

Stanley grew up in Vienna, Va., a then-small town 15 minutes outside of D.C. She knew she wanted to be a lawyer starting in high school.

"There were some good TV programs that featured lawyers that I liked and there were lawyers in our neighborhood that I knew well," she said. "My grandfather was a lawyer, but he retired long since from when I was aware of it. So, I wasn't unfamiliar with it."

Stanley followed her dream and graduated in 1973 from the University of Virginia School of Law.

At that time, she was engaged and her fiancé had a summer job in West Virginia. Meanwhile, Stanley had a job elsewhere. After getting married, she started looking for a job in West Virginia.

However, her job search was not an easy one.

"None of the law firms here were hiring women. It wasn't done," she said, later adding a particularly frustrating experience.

"One of the places I applied for was up at the statehouse," she recalled. "I was told on the phone that they would not consider me unless I promised I would not have a baby for five years. That made me pretty mad."

Frustrated, Stanley kept up her search and had a successful interview at Columbia Gas Transmission, where she ended up working for a couple of years.

Yet, after she had her first child, she started her search again, seeking part-time work.

That's when she got the first job in her field, working as a part-time law clerk for U.S. District Judge Dennis Raymond Knapp.

"I did that for 18 months. Meanwhile, I was pregnant with my second child and in fact, I was seven or eight months pregnant and decided that was a great time to go job hunting," Stanley said with a slight laugh.

At that time, the Department of Justice encouraged U.S. attorneys to hire more women and minorities. Stanley made history when she was hired as the first woman assistant U.S. attorney in West Virginia.

For a period of time, Stanley even job shared with another new mother.

"I did that for 15 years and I loved it. It was a great job," she said.

At the time, there were not too many women in the courthouse, Stanley recalled.

"Everybody was as man — the court reporter, deputy clerk, all the marshals, all the probation officers — everyone was a man," she said. "I would often be the only woman in the whole room during a hearing. So, you can't help but feel like you stick out."

And being the first woman in these positions came with its own set of pressures.

"I set a higher standard for myself because I felt like I had to demonstrate that women were as good or better than men," she said. "So, I've always tried to be the best. I felt like if I didn't do well that it would be more difficult for other women coming behind me."

Add to that the lingering stress of day-to-day activities.

"Well, I worked an awful lot," she explained. "Particularly when I was on trial, I would work an extraordinary amount of hours and not get much sleep," she said.

To de-stress, she would jog several times a week.

"And I found that if I was extremely well organized that I felt that I had better control over the case," she said. "That was another part of coping with the stress."

A job later opened as a U.S. Magistrate Court judge in Beckley and Bluefield.

"By that time, I had three kids. Two were in high school and one was in middle school. I was in Charleston and driving up the interstate to Beckley and Bluefield," she recalled.

Stanley became the first female U.S. magistrate judge in the state, happening at the right time in her life. And being a judge, Stanley said, was less stressful than being an attorney.

"When you're a young lawyer, you want to learn how to try cases and present matters to a jury, so that

was great, but I also really got worn out and kind of burned out so that when I was in my mid 40s, it was a great time to go on the bench because I still got courtroom work but all I had to worry about was making decisions, and I can make decisions. I don't agonize over them for too long."

However, Stanley said even judges are human.

"There are some cases that keep you awake at night, where you have second thoughts," she said. "What I tell new judges is one of the wonderful things about being a judge is being able to vacate your own order. There are occasions where I said basically, 'oops' and vacated an order or withdrew a particular ruling because I might have announced something from the bench saying we're going to do thus and such and then come in here and writing an order and getting the citations of law and realize, 'this just isn't right.'"

"You can vacate an order or withdraw something," she added. "See, that's a nice thing. We all make mistakes."

After 40 steady years of work, Stanley says she looks forward to free time in retirement.

"I really enjoy being outside," she said. "Since I'm retiring in spring, I have lots of gardening to do. I have a brand new bicycle and I'm also going to travel. I have a three-week trip to Spain planned and I'm leaving in April. I have two beautiful granddaughters I want to visit. I have lots to do."

Yet, Stanley will always remember the people she worked alongside.

"Over these years, all the work has really been enhanced by the outstanding district judges that we have here," she said.